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RUEHPO/AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO PRIORITY 1042
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SUBJECT: DOMINICAN POLITICS III #7: ANECDOTES FROM EARLY
STAGES OF PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

REF: SANTO DOMINGO 3022

Classified By: Economic-Political Counselor Michael A. Meigs, Reasons 1
.4(b), (d)

11. This is the seventh cable in our series on Dominican
politics in the third years of the administration of
President Leonel Fernandez.

(U) The presidential election in the Dominican Republic will
not take place until May 2008; however, intra-party
maneuvering has already begun in earnest. We therefore offer
these anecdotes on the campaign.

FERNANDEZ WILL RUN IN 2008

-- (SBU) President Fernandez told the Embassy long ago that
he wants to focus on governing and will not make a decision
on running for reelection until one year before the polls.
Fernandez is keeping his cards close to his chest, but until
we receive indications to the contrary we assume that as a
popular incumbent he will run.

-- (C) The talk in Santo Domingo, and we stress that it is
only talk at this time, is of tension between Fernandez and
his powerful Chief of Staff Danilo Medina (pictured above).
On a recent visit to the Palace, an Embassy FSN overheard a
Medina staffer arguing with an official whom she assumed was
an assistant to Fernandez. The Medina aid, by way of
explaining why he had not responded to his counterpart, asked
"No sabe que hay una maldita guerra en este Palacio?!" (Don't
you know there's a damn war in this Palace?). Our FSN
believed the clear implication was that the "guerra" was
between Medina's and Fernandez's staffs.

-- (C) In a recent meeting with Country Officer David Searby,
Senator Francisco Dominguez Brito, an influential member of

the ruling Dominican Liberation Party (PLD), said that "he had heard" that Medina will challenge Fernandez for the party's nomination, announcing as early as October 20.

THE BIG MAN IN THE OPPOSITION IS VARGAS MALDONADO

-- (SBU) The three-month primary campaign for the Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD), the largest opposition group, began on October 5. Quickly thereafter, several billboards around Santo Domingo went up touting Miguel Vargas Maldonado, the wealthy former Minister of Public Works who is the heavy favorite to win the intra-party poll.

-- (C) Former President Hipolito Mejia is now publicly backing Vargas, and added in statements to the press that he himself could beat Fernandez at any time between now and his "senility" (Mejia is constitutionally barred from running). Vargas' opponent for the PRD nomination, former Vice President Milagros Ortiz Bosch, responded to Mejia's boasts by saying, "He (must) be using the same polling firm that predicted he would beat Leonel Fernandez (in 2004) and that we would win a majority of Senate seats in the last election." Mejia lost badly to Fernandez in 2004 and, under his leadership, the PRD was swept from its majorities in both houses of Congress in 2006.

-- (C) In a meeting with the Ambassador on October 20, Ortiz spoke at length about corruption and energy reform, an indication of the issues she plans to focus on during the primary campaign. (Ortiz may see vulnerability for Vargas on the corruption issue; see Reftel.) Ortiz also commented on the efforts of her Corriente Unitaria faction to democratize internal PRD practices, citing as a success the preparations

for the January 2007 party convention. When asked if the loser of the primary campaign would support the winner, the former Vice President declined to answer, saying that if she lost her decision on whether to back Vargas would depend on the "transparency" of the convention process. Regarding the rival PLD party, Ortiz commented that "all indications" are that Fernandez will run for re-election. Regarding Medina, Ortiz believes that the Chief of Staff controls the PLD structure but lacks Fernandez's charisma. Comparing Medina to the eloquent and well-dressed Fernandez, Ortiz argues, is to contrast "structure and perfume."

¶2. (U) Drafted by Peter Hemsch.

¶3. (U) This report and extensive other material can be consulted on our SIPIRNET site,
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/santodomingo/>
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